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# Worship



A RESOURCE FOR LEADERS

CHRISTIAN  
EDUCATION

creative  confirmation

# Worship

by Chip Borgstadt  
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Augsburg Fortress, Minneapolis

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## activities key



remembering (R)



seeking (S)



wandering (W)



hoping (H)

Creative Confirmation Series  
Worship

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# Introduction

## CREATIVE CONFIRMATION

Welcome to the Creative Confirmation Series. This series invites you to customize a confirmation program that meets the needs of your youth and your congregation. These flexible confirmation resources work together through active and experiential learning activities to emphasize basic Bible literacy, the Small Catechism, worship, and daily life in the Christian community.

## LEADER RESOURCES

Nine resource books are provided for pastors and leaders. *Bible 1*, *Bible 2*, *Bible 3*, and *Small Catechism* serve as the core of the program. The other five leader resources—*Worship*, *Community-Building Activities and Games*, *Sharing the Language of Faith*, *Mission/Service Projects*, and *Parent Conversations*—help you build a comprehensive confirmation program by providing related activities that nurture faith development in a community setting. The sessions are designed for a group of up to 12 middle school students.

## LEARNER RESOURCES

*Study Bible: The New Student Bible NRSV* (Augsburg Fortress code 30-10-999) and *A Contemporary Translation of Luther's Small Catechism: Study Edition* (Augsburg Fortress code 15-5305) are the primary student resources for Creative Confirmation sessions. In some sessions a reproducible page from the leader resource is used. The *Youth Journal* guides learner reflection on many of the sessions in *Bible 1*, *Bible 2*, *Bible 3*, *Small Catechism*, *Worship*, and *Sharing the Language of Faith*. In session plans, look for the

symbol and page number that point to a *Youth Journal* activity.

**About Worship ♦** *Worship* is one of the leader resources for Creative Confirmation. This resource offers ways for youth and their leaders to contemplate and enter the experience of worship meaningfully and in community. It includes sessions on Lutheran worship and ideas for openings and closings. This resource will help youth and their leaders:

- ♦ better understand Lutheran worship;
- ♦ experience worship by active involvement in the activities and opening and closing exercises;
- ♦ participate more fully in congregational worship.

## USING THIS RESOURCE

Each of the 63 sessions in this book is designed to last about 20 minutes. Within a single learning period, churches can group more than one worship session or combine a single worship session with activities from the other resource books.

If you are responsible for the entire class time, matching the symbol included in each session will guide you in selecting activities from the other resource books. (See key on contents/credits page.) If an activity does not have a symbol, it can be used in any session.

This resource offers ways for youth and their leaders to contemplate and enter the experience of worship meaningfully and in community.

# Youth in Worship

"I was glad when they said to me, 'Let us go to the house of the Lord!' " (Psalm 122:1 NRSV). Perhaps you remember reciting that verse with others at Sunday school opening exercises. At that age, worship was pretty mysterious. You were too short to see without standing on the pews, and most of the service was passed with drawing, eating dry cereal from a plastic bag, and laying a head on Mom or Dad's lap.

But then came that age—the certain age when church was supposed to make sense. You were old enough. You should have been paying attention. You should have been getting something out of it. But did you? "Church is boring." "I just keep on falling asleep." "I don't seem to get anything out of it." Worship lacks the action of football, the energy of music television, and the physical comfort of an easy chair. What does worship have to be to attract and interest people?

When people say they feel bored, just what do they mean, really? At the very least, they are saying that they feel left out. Worship cannot take all its cues from the hype and pace of the media, but it can involve, engage, or at least irritate! Think again about children in worship. Preschool children can usually sit still or be quiet, but usually not both at once! To make sitting still more tolerable, some parents come to church armed with snacks, crayons, quiet toys, and blankets. Some churches have

added a children's sermon or children's bulletins with the experience of worship. All this is a way of telling children, "You are important. You belong here."

So, then, what about the rest of us? Just as young children have particular needs in worship, so do youth, and so do adults. But can worship be a combination of age-appropriate activities? Worship inspires many different experiences for a group of people with many different expectations.

Allan Sagar wrote a book called *Gospel-Centered Spirituality* (Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1990) in which he asserts that Christian spirituality is experienced in a variety of ways. The ways we experience worship influence how we think about God, how we look for God, how we hear God, and what we expect from our faith. Four basic expressions of faith include: social regeneration (prayer leading to witness), theological renewal (prayer leading to insight), inner life (prayer leading to mystical union with God), and personal renewal (prayer leading to God's presence).

The Bible provides many illustrations of people who practiced different expressions of faith. In Jesus' day, the groups were not only spiritual, but political and social as well. Pharisees handed down the oral tradition and observances. Aristocratic Sadducees were the law keepers. Patriotic Zealots deeply resented foreign domination of their country and sought the kingdom of God on

earth through political action. The ascetic Essenes practiced piety toward God, justice toward other human beings, fidelity toward members of the community, and unrelenting resistance of evil. Think for a moment about Christians you know. They come in different types, and in many combinations.

Now imagine your sanctuary, filled to capacity. There you are, all set to worship. But does a person interested in personal renewal have the same worship needs and expectations as a person interested in social regeneration? For each person, worship has a different emphasis. Could even four people agree what worship should look like? What it should sound like? What you can hope for? When worship is "good"? Think about these questions as they connect with you personally. A good worship service will meet many people in different ways.

This is one reason why Lutheran worship is built on the framework of the liturgy. Sunday after Sunday, we use this worship formula to tell the story of our own brokenness, God's forgiving love, and our thankfulness. Lutheran worship offers time for introspection and reflection, praise and prayer. It is full of opportunities to give thanks and praise to God.

Just as adults need a variety of worship experiences, so do youth. One might generalize by saying that youth prefer contemporary music to more traditional, but what is "contemporary"? Being contemporary means being

up-to-date, and that means being constantly new. Contemporary music comes in country, rap, rock, jazz, hip hop, bee bop, bluegrass, grunge, and many more styles. Youth come in at least that many varieties, and some don't like music at all!

Helping youth connect with worship is more than trading one hymnal for another. And if we want youth to participate in worship, we must allow them to make contributions and provide leadership in their own ways. Look around your congregation. Where do you see youth? If the answer is "In the youth room," your congregation is missing out on the gifts of youth in worship.

Use the talents of youth in worship. Youth can sing songs, write prayers and poems, draw children's bulletins, read scripture, preach, teach, and laugh. Whatever lay programs your church currently has should include youth. Whatever lay programs your congregation is missing could be initiated by youth.

Helping youth connect with worship means taking seriously our call to discipleship. It means connecting with them and their interests. It means asking for their involvement in the business of the church: call committees, church council, ushering, worship planning, altar care, music, and cleaning. It means inviting them in, sharing your stories with them, and listening to theirs.

These activities will be empty unless they can involve and engage youth in worship experiences—and maybe irritate them, just a little. Worship is an experience of mutual ministry where everyone is invited. All come. All participate. All receive. All speak. All hear.

Read through all of the ideas in this resource book. Then, before you begin using them with your confirmation group, establish good communications with your pastor and the worship planning committee. Pray together with them that worship will provide opportunities for *all* people. Discuss with them the ways youth are currently involved in worship leadership. Let them know about some of the worship activities you will be doing with the participants, and brainstorm together about new ways that youth can lead, contribute, and participate in worship.

You will not be able to use all of the ideas at once. Begin by choosing a few specific ways to more fully involve youth in worship. Space them throughout the year. You may also need to commit a block of time to a single idea, using it for several weeks in a row or in some regular way to establish a pattern for continued use. Whatever you do, remember that worship needs to build people up. In worship, we join our hearts and our voices. We blend our life experiences. We look for support from one another. We share one another's burdens.

Enjoy the activities in this book and look for ways to use what you learn together. Together you can celebrate with the words of the psalmist: "Worship the Lord with gladness; come into his presence with singing" (Psalm 100:2 NRSV).

Helping youth  
connect with  
worship is  
more than  
trading one  
hymnal for  
another.

## Lutheran worship

# Introduction

In Lutheran worship we celebrate the fact that the Holy Spirit has called us through the gospel, gathered us together, and enlightened us with gifts. Worship comes in many different forms. These 20-minute activities will help make your confirmation group aware of the content of our Lutheran liturgical worship, invite them to create new worship traditions, and encourage them to share their gifts of leadership.

## Lutheran worship

# Using your senses

### FOCUS

Worship should engage as many of our senses as possible.

**PREPARATION** If a television and VCR are available, set them up in your meeting area. If not, skip the "Warm-Up" activity. Find a science or nature video to use if VCR equipment is available.

**BACKGROUND** How often have you heard comments like "Church is boring" or "I don't get anything out of worship"? Perhaps worship can seem boring because so much of the service uses only two of our senses: sight and hearing. This activity will help participants to think about how worship can involve all of their senses.

**WARM-UP** If possible, begin the session by playing a video. Before the group arrives, advance the video to the start of the movie. First, adjust the television so that the volume is at a normal level but the picture is darkened. Wait for the participants to comment on the picture, then readjust the television so that the picture is visible but the sound can barely be heard.

Finally, adjust the television so that both sound and picture are normal. After a moment, turn off the video and ask the participants, "Which gave you the most information: the picture only, the sound only, or both picture and sound?" (*Both picture and sound.*)

Ask the participants to name the five senses. (*Sight, smell, hearing, taste, and touch.*) Then ask the participants to name one way each of the senses are used during worship. (*Sight: reading the words of the hymns. Hearing: listening to the gospel. Touch: sharing the peace. Taste: eating bread and wine during Holy Communion. Smell: incense or candles.*) Many people might say that we go to church to listen, but when we are engaged in the work of worship, we need all five senses.

**ACTIVITY** As a group, evaluate how the sense of sight is stimulated in your worship space and during the service. If the sanctuary is available to you, go there.

Ask, "When you first sit down, what catches your eye? Is it something that interests you in worship and helps you to think about God? What distracts you or looks like it doesn't belong? What do you think is beautiful? What looks good in your worship space? If you were in charge of furnishing your worship space, what would you add or change?" Invite the participants to record their own ideas on writing paper.

Direct the participants to add ideas that relate to other senses after they attend worship. You may wish to attend worship together and meet afterwards to discuss the findings. Otherwise, use the next session to talk together about what they discover. Then, as a group, compile your responses into a set of recommendations for your church council or worship planning committee. Your group may wish to identify specific changes or additions that they could be responsible for.

Do what you can to see that some official action is taken to recognize the work of your group. It is important that the church express thanks to the youth, even if no changes can be made at the present time.

**RESPONSE** Gather the group for a time of prayer. Give thanks for our senses and ask God to make us aware of God's presence.

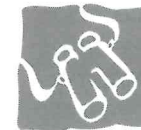
 See corresponding activity in the *Youth Journal*, page 52.

## Lutheran worship

# Blueprint for worship

### FOCUS

The liturgy provides a framework for worship planning and a rhythm for worship.



**PREPARATION** (Please note: this session could take longer than 20 minutes!)

Prior to the session, gather copies of *Lutheran Book of Worship (LBW)*, make copies of Lutheran Worship Blueprint (Reproducible Page 1, found on page 43 of this resource book), and get copies of your church bulletin (for the upcoming Sunday if possible, or from a previous week), and markers or crayons. On a chalkboard or large chart paper, draw a large asterisk using four or five lines that intersect at a central point like spokes on a wheel. (You may wish to also use ideas about liturgy presented in *Sharing the Language of Faith* in the unit called "Theological/Liturgical Terms." There are two activity titles that relate: "Liturgy, Lesson, Creed" and "Liturgical Phrases.")

**BACKGROUND** Lutheran worship is liturgical. As we worship, we experience and proclaim many truths about the life of faith: that it is a celebration, that it is painful, and that we need God and others. By focusing on the mood and the message of the liturgy, participants can come to understand that liturgical worship offers rhythm for our lives of faith.

**WARM-UP** Begin by asking the participants to think of just one word that explains what they need or expect when they come to worship. (Leaders, be prepared for responses of any kind!) Go around the room and record all the responses, negative and positive, one in each triangle shape space on the asterisk drawing. Comment on the variety of responses.

Then draw a circle around the outside to enclose all of the responses and make the point that worship means different things to different people but that all of these things are indeed worship.

Select just one of the words from the list and say, "Imagine that from now on, worship could be only (*praise-oriented, or quiet and prayerful, or listening to a sermon, or fellowship.*)" Shade in that section of the diagram. Then say, "If worship meant only one particular thing, how many people's needs and expectations would be met?" (*Just a few.*)

**ACTIVITY** Ask the participants, "Have you ever heard the word *liturgy*? What do you think it means?" Accept all responses, positive and negative. (*Develop the definition to include things like a format, a guide to public worship, a plan, and so forth.*)

Tell the participants that the Lutheran church uses a liturgy to give worship order and rhythm. It is a collection of different messages about our faith lives. The liturgy is like the bicycle wheel diagram. It has many spokes—many elements—that work together. Using the liturgy gives us a chance to express many of the thoughts and feelings that we experience as we journey in faith.

Distribute copies of your congregation's worship bulletin and note the order of the worship service. Then distribute Reproducible Page 1, *Worship Blueprint*. Direct the participants' attention to the words inside the bicycle wheel. These words from the liturgy have been used throughout the centuries of Christian worship by many people in many denominations in many countries.

Distribute copies of *LBW*. Using the sections listed on Reproducible Page 1, allow the participants about five minutes to compare their congregation's worship bulletin with the order presented in *LBW*. Page numbers are listed, referring to *LBW*, Setting One. (Your congregation may use Setting Two or Three or perhaps a different worship order, so the page numbers in your bulletin may not correspond. But reading the words from *LBW* will help participants to identify the message of each part of the liturgy.)


Explore the various parts of the service, focusing on the mood each inspires, whether it is active, passive, participatory, solitary, joyful, prayerful, meditative, and so forth. Invite the participants to choose a color to represent the mood of each worship element and color the wheel on Reproducible Page 1.

In groups of three or four, invite them to use Reproducible Page 1 to help them explore the *LBW* worship model. If there are several small groups, each group could focus on particular sections of the service. Explore and discuss the

words and music from *LBW* in the small groups. Invite the groups to choose other songs, readings, scriptures, or prayers that could express the messages of the Gloria (hymn of praise), the Kyrie, and other parts of the worship service. Invite them to record their plans on Reproducible Page 1.

After approximately 10 minutes, call the group back together. Encourage them to share their ideas. If participants have had difficulty with any parts of the service, brainstorm together about some new way to experience it.

**RESPONSE** Compile the group's suggestions and pass them along to the pastor or worship planning committee. Encourage worship planners to review carefully the ideas and implement those that are possible, involving youth where possible.

 See corresponding activity in the *Youth Journal*, page 53.

## Lutheran worship Forgiveness

### FOCUS

When we confess our sins we acknowledge that we, by ourselves, are powerless against sin and that it is God who acts to save and to forgive us. Through the confession and forgiveness portion of the liturgy, we remember God's covenant of forgiveness given in our baptisms.



**PREPARATION** Have a chalkboard or chart paper available. Have copies of *LBW*, Bibles, and copies of the Small Catechism available for this session.

**BACKGROUND** In many Lutheran churches, worship begins with the Brief Order for Confession and Forgiveness. By beginning in this way, we confess who we are: sinful, broken people. We also confess who God is: powerful, loving, and forgiving. Far more than reciting a list of wrongs, the words "in bondage to sin" remind

us that we are, by nature, sinful people, and that we can do nothing to save ourselves. We look to God for gracious forgiveness and love.

**WARM-UP** Ask participants to turn to 1 John 1:8-9 and ask a volunteer to read aloud this passage. When they have finished, say, "These words may be familiar to you from worship. In what part of the service are they used?" (*The pastor says them to the congregation during the Brief Order for Confession and Forgiveness.*) "What does the word *sin* mean?" (*Sin is "missing the mark." The participants may also list individual kinds of transgressions, but help them to see that sin is the condition in which humans exist, not just bad behavior.*) "What does this Bible verse tell us about sin?" (*All people are sinful. If we say we aren't, then we are liars.*) "If people are hopelessly sinful, then what is there to be hopeful about?" (*God wants to forgive us and will do so.*) See also the *Sharing the Language of Faith* resource book for another related activity titled "Sin, Salvation" in the "Theological/Liturgical Terms" unit.

**ACTIVITY** Distribute copies of the Small Catechism and ask participants to turn to the Fifth Petition of the Lord's Prayer. Ask a volunteer to read aloud the petition and its explanation. Ask, "What does this say about confession and forgiveness?" (*When we say, "Forgive us our sins as we forgive those who sin against us," we admit that we are sinful and we must depend on God's grace, not our worthiness for salvation. We ask God to forgive us and try to be forgiving people.*)

Ask, "What words would you add or change if you were to rewrite this confession for yourself?" Allow the participants five minutes to work on their own or with one other person to rewrite the confession in their own words.

**RESPONSE** Gather the group together. Distribute copies of *LBW* and direct the participants to page 56. Ask for a volunteer to read the part of the pastor (labeled "P"). Participants can read the sections that the congregation reads (labeled "C"). Instead of reading the confession printed in the hymnal, invite the participants to read the confessions they have written.

Then read the Absolution: the second option under rubric 3. Thank the group for its participation.

## Lutheran worship Scriptures alive

### FOCUS

Lutheran worship is centered in God's Word and Sacraments. This activity focuses on God's Word.



**PREPARATION** Have chart paper and markers or a chalkboard and chalk available for this session. Bibles are also needed for this session.

**BACKGROUND** Each Sunday we listen to God's Word for us in Old Testament, Psalm, New Testament, and Gospel readings. Varying the ways that scripture readings are presented can help communicate the gospel more clearly.

**WARM-UP** Ask the participants to name four different scripture readings that are commonly used during worship. (*Old Testament, Psalms, New Testament Epistles, and Gospel.*)


Ask, "Who can recall what the scripture readings from last Sunday were about?" Record any ideas on the chart paper or chalkboard. Do not be surprised if they are unable to remember any of the readings. Refresh their memories about which scriptures were read.

**ACTIVITY** Ask the group to think about some ways the scriptures could have been presented in a more memorable way. Encourage them to think about ways to involve all the five senses. (*Suggestions might include using a sign language interpreter; singing a hymn based on the Bible text; using a choral reading group to present a reading with many different voices—one person reads Jesus' words, another reads Martha's, and so forth; a skit or pantomime; rap or poetry; musical instrument; dance; clowning; and others.*)

Form four groups (a group could be just one person if that person is comfortable reading) and assign one reading to each group. Encourage participants who have reading difficulties to work together with someone else. Provide separate locations for each group to meet to

discuss the readings. Challenge each group to find a way, other than simply reading it, to present each reading. Remind them that it is important not to change the message as the Bible presents it. Tell them they will have five minutes to prepare.

**RESPONSE** After five minutes, call the group back together. If it is available to you, go to your church sanctuary and have each group take turns presenting their portion of Scripture—Old Testament, Psalm, Epistle, and Gospel. Close with prayer. You might use the prayer "Grace to Receive the Word" on page 47 of *LBW*.

 See corresponding activity in the *Youth Journal*, page 54.

## Lutheran worship Prayer

### FOCUS

In worship we gather, not only to hear God's Word, but to ask God's will for ourselves and for others.



**PREPARATION** Have chart paper and markers or chalk and a chalkboard ready to use. Copies of *LBW*, paper, and pencils are also necessary for this session.

**BACKGROUND** Prayer is our connection with God. It is a two-way connection. The group will explore some of the written prayers in *LBW* and write petitions that can be used in worship.

**WARM-UP** Ask for a volunteer to record group responses on the chart paper or chalkboard. Ask the group, "What are some things we usually pray about during worship?" (*Answers will vary depending upon your congregation's practices.*) Then ask, "What are some things you have never heard prayed about during worship that you think should be prayed about?" (*Answers will vary.*)

**ACTIVITY** Ask the participants to turn to page 52 in *LBW*. Together, take note of the many different things that are prayed for here. (To do this briefly, invite the participants to note the first three words in each petition.) The Prayer of the Church does not come from just one person's point of view. It uses words like "we" and "our." It is the prayer of God's people joined to praise, to ask, and to give thanks for personal needs and for the needs of others.

Invite each participant to write a petition about a concern listed earlier using their own words. Remind them to use "we" and "us," because the prayers are written on behalf of the whole people of God. Tell them that each petition should end with the words "Lord, in your mercy." Tell the participants that "mercy" means kindness or grace. This part of the prayer acknowledges who we know God to be. Allow about 10 minutes.

Talk with your pastor or worship planning committee to see whether petitions written by youth could be regularly included in the Prayer of the Church.

**RESPONSE** Gather the group together. If it is available to you, go to your church sanctuary. Kneel or sit together and explain that each person will have an opportunity to read aloud the petition he or she composed. At the end of each petition, tell the participants to say, "Lord, in your mercy." The rest of the group then responds, "Hear our prayer."

Lutheran worship

## Holy Communion

### FOCUS

Making and presenting bread will help youth to feel connected to the congregation and to the sacrament of Holy Communion.



**PREPARATION** See the recipe for a list of ingredients and provide necessary baking supplies. Discuss this project with your pastor or worship planning committee. You may want to offer the bread and juice for a certain Sunday or

a special communion service, such as Maundy Thursday. Ask whether members of your group may help with the distribution of Holy Communion.

**BACKGROUND** Jesus used earthly things—bread and wine—to help his disciples experience something spiritual—his presence. This activity will help the group to focus on the earthly element of Holy Communion bread. We receive Christ in common, ordinary things.

**WARM-UP** If your sanctuary is available, ask someone to help you prepare the altar for Holy Communion. Invite your pastor or someone from the altar guild to speak with your group about how the preparations are made when this sacrament is celebrated. Otherwise, be prepared to tell about the paraments, the type of bread and wine that are used, and other practical things about the distribution of Holy Communion.

Take the group to the altar area. Invite them to look at the things on the altar. They should make note of the things they see. Then talk about how the objects are used. Allow time for questions. If you do not know the answer, write down the question and tell them you will find the answer.

**ACTIVITY** Following is a recipe for communion bread. You will need more than 20 minutes to make the bread from start to finish, so plan accordingly.

#### Bread recipe

3 to 4 cups flour  
½ teaspoon salt  
1 tablespoon honey  
1 tablespoon yeast (quick-rise yeast if possible)  
1 cup warm water

Add the yeast and the honey to the water and let it rest until it gets foamy, approximately 10 minutes (this time will be shorter if quick-rise yeast is used). Mix the flour and the salt in a large bowl. Add the water-yeast mixture and stir until it is no longer sticky. Knead. Allow the dough to rise. Divide the dough and bake in small rounds on a greased baking sheet. Bake at 425 degrees until golden brown. (Each recipe serves 25 people.)

**RESPONSE** Set aside some of the bread you have made. Invite your pastor to celebrate Holy Communion with the group, using the bread they have made.

Church seasons

## Introduction

The seasons of the church year provide us with a rhythm that marks the ebb and flow of our lives. The church year is divided into seasons, the major ones being Advent/Christmas and Lent/Easter. The activities in this section connect learners with celebrations in the various seasons. Use them to introduce each season during the instructional year or as a separate learning unit. The Church Year (Reproducible page 2, found on page 44 of this resource book) handout may be photocopied and used as a reference during any or all of these sessions.

Church seasons

## Advent: All dressed up

### FOCUS

Anticipating God's action in our lives is enjoyable and exciting.



**PREPARATION** Gather these items ahead of time for use during this session: index cards, masking tape, old newspapers, scissors, and Bibles.

Before the session, mark the index cards with the labels listed below. If you have a very large class, you may need to make additional labels by duplicating ideas from this list or creating your own ideas. If your group is smaller, choose as many labels from the list as you need. The activity will still work even if there is just one group.

#### Labels for index cards:

basketball player  
football game spectator  
ballet dancer  
worship participant  
Thanksgiving dinner turkey

**BACKGROUND** Advent is celebrated the four weeks before Christmas. It is the beginning of the church year, and it is a season of preparation and anticipation. The liturgical color for Advent is royal blue or purple, reminding us that we are awaiting the coming of royalty into our midst. The Advent wreath uses four candles to count the weeks until the birth of Jesus. As the candles are lit, we remember God's promise to send a savior and the way God brought the fulfillment of that promise.

**WARM-UP** Form teams of three or four people. Have each team choose one person to be the "tailor." Give the "tailor" of each team one of the cards. Tell the "tailors" to keep the characters on the cards a secret from the rest of their teams.

Give each team a roll of masking tape and a stack of newspapers. Have the "tailor" direct other team members in tearing and taping the paper to one team member to represent the person on their card, without telling the team what they are creating.

When everyone is finished, have a class "fashion show," and encourage others to guess what each creation represents.

Ask the participants how they felt about the part they played in this activity.

Say, "Sometimes it's frustrating to wait. But when we know what is probably going to happen, the anticipation of waiting can be enjoyable and exciting. Advent is like that—we enjoy the anticipation of Christmas, and we get ready for its excitement."

**ACTIVITY** Assign each of the teams one of the following scriptures. (Give two teams the same passage if there are more than three teams.)

Matthew 1:18-25;

Luke 1:26-38;

Luke 3:1-6, 15-16.


Have each group identify the messengers in the passage and quote the messages given. Have the teams think of two questions the hearers of the message might ask while waiting for the events foretold in the message to happen.

Ask, "If you had received this message, how would you react when you saw it actually happen?"

Say, "We are always asked to trust God's word. The promise of a savior was something people had anticipated for centuries. Hearing

God's promises and anticipating God's action in their lives was just as exciting as it is for us during Advent today."

**RESPONSE** Read Psalm 5:1-7. Have participants add lines to the psalm describing times when they are waiting for God, and what they do while they are waiting. Assign halves of the class to alternately read the psalm and the new lines written by the class.


 See corresponding activity in the *Youth Journal*, page 55.

## Church seasons

# Christmas: Gifts galore!

### FOCUS

God blesses us with many gifts, but the best is Jesus.

 **PREPARATION** Before the session, gather wrapping paper, scissors, tape, a bell or whistle, slips of paper (1" x 6"), Bibles, good writing paper, and wedge-tipped markers or calligraphy pens.

**BACKGROUND** Everyone thinks of presents at Christmas. With the gift of Jesus, we receive blessings we don't deserve—and the opportunity to share them with others. No one knows the actual date of Jesus' birth, but the day of its celebration coincides with the darkest time in the solar year in the northern hemisphere. We are reminded that God comes in surprising ways when we least expect it.

**WARM-UP** Give each person a large piece of wrapping paper and some tape.

Say, "You have three minutes to find something in this room that represents a gift you could have brought to the manger where Jesus was born. Wrap that gift and bring it back by the signal." (*Gifts could include such items as a pencil, chair, picture, or book.*)

Keep the time and ring a bell or blow a whistle to signal the participants to gather. Have

each person present their gift. Designate an "unwrapper" to open the gifts.

Ask the givers to explain why they chose the gift given. Say, "How did you feel when asked to find a gift to give the baby Jesus?"

**ACTIVITY** Ask the participants to name one gift each they would put on their Christmas list if it were a month before Christmas. Write the gifts on 1" x 6" slips of paper and mix them up. Have participants pair up and pick two slips of paper. Each pair should search in Matthew, Mark, Luke, or John for something Jesus said that would apply to the gift on the paper. Some good places to look would be in the Sermon on the Mount in Matthew 5-7; Luke 6; and Luke 11-12.

After a few minutes of searching, participants share the words of Jesus and the gifts listed. Say, "It's easy to focus on ourselves and forget that Christmas is actually a celebration of the gift God gave us—Jesus."

**RESPONSE** Make gifts for people in the congregation or for nursing home residents by carefully lettering encouraging words that Jesus spoke. Invite participants to find a favorite verse or use one of these:  
The Beatitudes (Matthew 5:3-11),  
Ask, Seek, Knock (Matthew 7:7-11),  
Light of the World (John 8:12),  
The Good Shepherd (John 10:7-16),  
Jesus the Resurrection (John 11:25-26).

Use good quality writing paper and markers or calligraphy pens. Keep the phrase choices simple so that many gifts can be made with minimal frustration. Encourage adding decorative symbols or borders. Wrap the encouraging words as gifts for distribution.


As a group, pray for the people who will receive the gifts.

## Church seasons

# Epiphany: Following the star

### FOCUS

Christ is made visible in our midst as we live by his teachings.

 **PREPARATION** Prior to the session, gather writing paper, pencils or markers, Bibles, and scissors. List several destinations in the church's neighborhood.

**BACKGROUND** Symbolized by a star, Epiphany is a time when we travel with the Wise Men to see a most amazing wonder: God in human form, living in the midst of creation. And with the Wise Men, we leave by another route. Hearing the parables of Jesus during this season, we pray to understand more about God's domain. Epiphany becomes our "telescope" to search for that which is far off, and yet right in front of us.

**WARM-UP** Form teams of three. Give each team a destination, and tell them that they have to write instructions for other teams to go from the classroom to the destination in exactly five "steps."

Have them make a five-pointed star on a piece of paper and write one instruction on each point. Don't write the instructions in order. Indicate the destination in the middle of the star.

When instructions are written, invite the groups to trade papers and have each team try to put the instructions in order to reach the destination. Return the instructions to the writing teams for verification.

Ask, "If you didn't know where the destination was, how do you think you would feel in trying to put the directions in order?"

Say, "It can be frustrating in knowing where we have to go, but not knowing how to get there. During the season of Epiphany, we study Jesus' teachings to gain new insights about our own faith journeys."

**ACTIVITY** Assign each team one of the following parables:

The Sower (Mark 4:1-9),  
The Growing Seed (Mark 4:26-29),  
The Mustard Seed (Mark 4:30-32),  
The Good Samaritan (Luke 10:25-37),  
The Great Feast (Luke 14:15-24),  
Workers in the Vineyard (Matthew 20:1-16),  
The Weeds (Matthew 13:24-30).

Give teams 90 seconds to read their parables and quickly discuss the meaning. Then ask each team to tell their parable in this manner: Have the team members stand in a line in front of the class. The first person on the left starts telling the parable with one phrase, the second person adds a phrase, and the third person adds another. (The leader can point to each participant as it is her or his turn to add a phrase.) Keep rotating until the parable is told phrase by phrase by all team members. Have all teams do this with their parable.

Ask, "Which parable makes you think about being a person of faith today? Why?"

Say, "The Wise Men followed the star by faith. We follow Jesus' words by faith today."

Ask, "Who are some of the people who give you direction and help you follow God?"

**RESPONSE** Give each person a piece of paper and have them cut a star from it. Have participants write the names of people who guide them in their faith journeys on their stars. Post the stars in the classroom. Close the activity by praying petitions of thanksgiving for the "stars" in the participants' lives.

 See corresponding activity in the *Youth Journal*, page 56.

## Church seasons

# Lent: Looking and listening

### FOCUS

Prayer and reflection help us see our need for God's grace.

 **PREPARATION** Prior to the session, gather envelopes for each person, markers, Bibles, and recent newspapers.



**BACKGROUND** Lent begins as we recall the temptation of Jesus in the desert. We too face temptation and find strength in God's word to make daily choices as people of faith. This struggle can be difficult, but prayer and meditation help us keep focused on God, not on our own desires or circumstances. As Jesus' ministry drew him closer to the cross, he deepened his relationship with his disciples. We too can use the season of Lent to deepen relationships.

**WARM-UP** Ask for a volunteer to leave the room. Give each of the remaining participants an empty envelope. Have them write their names on the inside of the envelope and seal it. On the outside, they should write the name of the volunteer who has left the room. Each person then hides his or her envelope somewhere in the room. Instruct the group that when the volunteer returns, each person should begin telling the volunteer to find the envelope that has his or her name on it. Tell them to cheer for the volunteer as he or she gets near their envelope. They might even give specific directions for the person to follow in order to find it.

Bring the volunteer back into the room. Say, "We've hidden something for you, and we'll help you find it. Just listen for our clues."

After a couple of minutes (or after the volunteer finds one envelope), ask the volunteer, "How did you feel when so many people were trying to get you to follow their instructions?"

Ask the class, "How did you feel when the volunteer listened to you? How about if he or she didn't follow what you were saying?"

Say, "During Lent, we remember the temptations Jesus faced. Prayer and Scripture helped Jesus do what God wanted. Prayer and Scripture reading help us remember our need for God's grace during Lent too."

**ACTIVITY** Have a couple of volunteers read Luke 4:1-13. Ask, "With what did the devil tempt Jesus?"

Say, "People today are tempted by many things. We can find examples of these in our newspapers every day."

Material objects, wealth, and power are three categories of temptations. Form three teams and assign each team one of these categories. A team can be as small as one person. If you have a large class, form two teams for each of the temptation categories. Have them find newspaper articles that illustrate these temptations. Be sure participants identify what consequences the subjects experienced as a result of

giving into temptation. Share the articles with the entire group.

Ask, "What did Jesus do when faced with temptation?" (*He remembered Scripture.*)

Say, "Jesus also took time to think about Scripture and what it meant in his day-to-day life. Lent is a time when we can commit to meditation and prayer to help us stay focused on God's Word."

**RESPONSE** Invite the participants to locate Philippians 4:4-9 in their Bibles. Invite a volunteer to read it to the group. Have everyone find a comfortable place to sit and meditate on this scripture. Next, invite the participants to read silently one phrase at a time, then think of one way their lives might change if they remembered it regularly. Allow about five minutes for meditation and ask each person to share one insight.

Close by praying the Lord's Prayer together.

## Church seasons

# Easter: Plugging into power

### FOCUS

The resurrection is God's triumphant YES to the ministry of Christ—and to all people for whom Christ died.



**PREPARATION** Prior to the session, gather: lots of balloons, one old T-shirt or sweatshirt for every three or four people, chalkboard and chalk or chart paper and markers, writing paper, Bibles, several pieces of wool cloth, 1" x 6" slips of paper, and twist ties or string.

**BACKGROUND** Our lives are filled with limits. We have only 24 hours in a day—and we can't even decide how we use those hours. Work, school, and family all take some of our time. Even our life span is limited by our bodies' endurance. Life is filled with NO when we long to hear YES. Easter is God's resounding shout that NO is not the final answer. The resurrection gives us hope to continue in spite of limits.

**WARM-UP** Form teams of three or four. Give each team lots of balloons and an old T-shirt or sweatshirt. Tell the teams they have three minutes to blow up the balloons and stuff as many as possible into the shirts. After three minutes, stop the activity and have each team count the number of balloons they managed to get into their team's shirt.

Say, "We have lots of things to push into the limited time we have each day. Sometimes, we think we're going to 'pop' because of the pressure. Easter reminds us that even human limitations are overcome by Christ's resurrection from the dead."

**ACTIVITY** Have each team list as many sources of power (such as electrical, horse, light, mind, and so forth) as possible in ninety seconds. Combine ideas to make a group list.

Invite a volunteer to read Ephesians 1:15-23. Ask each person to select two words from that passage that stand out for him or her. Write verses 20 and 21 on a chalkboard or chart paper.

Examine how the word "power" is used in these two verses. Look at the list made earlier and ask, "What kind of power is this? How does it relate to the power sources on our group list?"

Combine teams to form groups of six to eight people. This activity can be done effectively with one small group as well. Distribute the balloons from the "Warm-Up" activity and have participants use twist ties to attach a piece of paper to each balloon. Invite the participants to write scripture verses from Ephesians 1:15-23 on the paper slips.

Give each group a piece of wool cloth. Have them rub the balloons with the wool cloth. The static electricity (power) will make the balloons stick to the walls, furniture, and other participants.

Say, "As you stick your balloons to other people, encourage each other with the words, 'God's power is working in you!'"

**RESPONSE** Close with a prayer thanking God for resurrection power to face our limitations. A litany where participants write one sentence thanking God for overcoming specific limitations in their lives may be used. After each person prays his or her line, the group responds, "God's power is very great for us who believe."

## Church seasons

# Pentecost: A job to do

### FOCUS

God's Spirit empowers us to live and proclaim the good news of Jesus' resurrection.



**PREPARATION** Prior to the session, gather ten paper cups for every three or four people, masking tape, Bibles, colored construction paper, scissors, and markers.

**BACKGROUND** Easter says, "Yes, you can." Pentecost, the last day of the Easter season, says, "Do it, now." On the day of Pentecost, the disciples shared the good news in powerful ways. During the days after Pentecost, we share the good news in many ways: feeding the hungry, clothing the naked, sheltering the homeless, and visiting the prisoner. We move from focusing on the life of Christ to a new focus on life in the church.

**WARM-UP** Form teams of three or four people. Give each team ten paper cups and a roll of masking tape. Have them build as tall a tower as possible with the cups and tape in two minutes or less. Call time and have each set their tower in the middle of their team. Have the oldest person on each team gently push the tower off balance while the others wait to see who will catch it and prevent it from falling. The person who catches it is out for one round—but the whole team is eliminated from the game if the tower falls completely. Play three or four rounds.

Ask, "How did you feel while your tower was falling?"

Have a volunteer read Acts 1:1-5. Ask, "What were the disciples instructed to do? (*Do not leave Jerusalem; wait for the promised gift.*) How do you think they felt?" (*Answers will vary.*)

**ACTIVITY** Invite volunteers within the teams to read Acts 2:1-24. Ask, "What did the Holy Spirit cause the believers to do?" (*Speak in other languages.*)

Have a different volunteer on each team read Acts 2:43-47. Ask, "How would you describe the group of believers in this passage?" (*Answers might include: excited, caring, amazing.*)

Say, "Pentecost is both a one-day celebration and a season of growth. The one-day *celebration* reminds us of God's Spirit telling the believers to get started in doing that which Jesus told them to do. The *season* helps us see the Spirit's power in our lives."

Say, "After the day of Pentecost, the believers went out to other places and shared the good news of God's grace with anyone who would listen."

Give each person a sheet of colored construc-

tion paper and have them trace around their shoes or stocking feet. Cut out the shapes.

Have the teams go to different places in the church building and identify ways to share the good news in those locations. For example, in the nursery they can sing "Jesus Loves Me," and in the kitchen they can prepare a meal for the homeless or hungry.

Write a sentence about each proclamation opportunity on a footprint and identify the location. Bring the footprints back to the group room and make a trail of good news opportunities by posting them around the room.

**RESPONSE** Form a circle and put arms over each others' shoulders. Pray for each good news opportunity. Take one step to the right to symbolize the chance to do good right now.

## Deeper involvement in worship rituals

# Introduction

Ritual is action that is repeated on a regular basis in liturgical worship. All of us have rituals in our everyday patterns of living. Rituals gain meaning when the actions are formalized and repeated in community. In worship, liturgy is ritual that is both communal and deeply personal. It is ritual that is both routine and sacred. Involvement in many of the rituals that play a part in the liturgical worship service can be difficult for youth. This section of the *Worship* resource book seeks to incorporate the rituals of worship into the personal struggles and the faith journeys of youth in ways that make faith come alive and become meaningful. The activities in this section are meant to encourage contemplation and wondering around our rituals as well as drawing youth more deeply into involvement in their Lutheran worshiping communities.

## Deeper involvement in worship rituals

# A communing community

### FOCUS

Communion provides for us a way to remember the sacrificial lifestyle led by Jesus the Christ. It is a practice shared within Christian faith communities that unites Christians around the world.



**PREPARATION** Have copies of *Lutheran Book of Worship (LBW)* and other communion liturgies in use by your congregation. Have a ball of yarn or string for this session. Have available a chalkboard and chalk or chart paper and markers. If you like, have some simple refreshments to share at the close of this session.

**BACKGROUND** The sacrament of Holy Communion is a powerful ritual in Christian worship. It is practiced both formally and infor-


mally in a variety of settings. It is both simple and complex. This section of the *Worship* resource book is not intended to provide instruction for first communion time. Confirmation age youth may be disinterested in communion because of its routine practice in worship, combined with a loss of any sense of mystery. Many simply do not see its connection in their personal lives. This activity attempts to reach into the heart of what Holy Communion means and help participants connect with it more personally as valued members of their worshiping communities. Communion is the body and blood of Jesus given with bread and wine and instituted by Christ himself.

**WARM-UP** Brainstorm together about symbols and what they help us remember. Use a chalkboard or chart paper to list or draw the symbols.

**ACTIVITY** Say, "Holy Communion is more than a symbol. Jesus the Christ comes to us with forgiveness, life, and salvation in the sacrament of Holy Communion.

Jesus was present both in body and in spirit in the gospel stories. Sit in a circle and give one participant a ball of string or yarn. Ask them to hold tightly to one end and toss it to another participant as they name a way that Jesus showed love to people in the Bible. Each participant holds on to a section of the yarn or string so that a web forms as the ball is tossed. Ask, "How is this web like community?" (*Everyone is connected, Jesus shows love for us in the sacrament of Holy Communion, and so forth.*)

**RESPONSE** Communion is bread and wine. It is shared in Lutheran congregations for the forgiveness of sins. This sacrament is celebrated in community. If you have prepared them, share refreshments together at this time and talk about the sense of community that group members may feel at present.

 See corresponding activity in the *Youth Journal*, page 57.

## Deeper involvement in worship rituals

# True confessions

### FOCUS

The confession and forgiveness portion of the worship service leads us to examine our lives and frees us to worship joyfully. It is another worship ritual that creates renewed hope and meaning in our daily lives.



**PREPARATION** Have available copies of *LBW* and other confession liturgies in use by your congregation. Also have small sheets of paper, writing pencils and erasers, or pens and correction fluid.

**BACKGROUND** Youth in their early adolescent years often have no trouble finding fault with themselves. As participants struggle to understand their growing bodies, this awareness leads them into self-examination with exacting scrutiny. What can be troublesome is when this self-examination is not balanced with any affirmation of the gifts that make them who they are. Many will find it easy to scrutinize other people in their lives as well. Without forgiveness, grace, and affirming love, some teens find no other solace but suicide. Confession and forgiveness are connected completely. Without confession there is no forgiveness, but without forgiveness, confession is in vain. Forgiveness is a difficult task for all people. Our understanding and acceptance of God's forgiveness can be deepened through involvement in the ritual of confession and forgiveness in Lutheran worship.

For further reflection, see Luther's explanation of confession and forgiveness in *A Contemporary Translation of Luther's Small Catechism: Study edition* on page 44.

**WARM-UP** After participants have gathered, ask four or five of them to help you play this game. Send one participant away from the group and give one of the remaining participants a dollar bill to hold behind his or her back. Ask the others to use the same pose. Then instruct all participants that they can only

say the phrase "I do not have the dollar bill" when asked by the participant who left.

Ask the first participant to return. Inform her or him that one of these participants has your dollar bill, and it is her or his job to find who is holding it. The only question she or he may ask is "Do you have the dollar bill?" It can be asked as many times as the participant wishes until she or he feels confident of identifying the liar. Try another game if this goes quickly.


**ACTIVITY** This activity is meant to help participants see that God's grace extends beyond our own human capabilities. Ask the participants to place themselves on a continuum line beginning with one side of the room being hard and becoming easier as the line continues to the other side of the room. Ask them how easy they would find it to forgive a friend who had done one of the following things.

- ◆ cheated on a test at school
- ◆ experimented with alcohol
- ◆ willfully broke something of value that belongs to you
- ◆ swore at you
- ◆ quit school
- ◆ vandalized your church building
- ◆ stole one of your favorite sweatshirts
- ◆ hurt a stray animal on purpose
- ◆ lied to his or her parents to keep out of trouble
- ◆ told a secret about a problem you shared with him or her

You may wish to adapt or add to these to match the situations of your participants. After the participants have lined up for each of these, invite them to explain why they are standing where they are. Try to create an opportunity for each participant to speak at least once during this activity.

If there is time at the end, ask the participants to share with a friend, or to write down on their own, which of these was the hardest one to forgive and why.

**RESPONSE** As a closing, ask the participants to form a circle. Read to them the absolution in the confession liturgy (*LBW*, page 56) and explain briefly that these are grace-filled words that do indeed set us free to make a change in our lives.

 See corresponding activity in the *Youth Journal*, page 58.

## Deeper involvement in worship rituals

# Creed creators

### FOCUS

A creed is made up of statements of faith that proclaim the shared beliefs of a faith community. This session focuses on why creeds are necessary and what they mean for us in our worshiping community and in our lives.



**PREPARATION** Have copies of the Athanasian Creed, Nicene Creed, and Apostles' Creed on hand. You may wish to have one copy per participant. If your congregation uses other creeds, you may choose to also have these available. Photocopy the reproducible page Creed Creators (Reproducible Page 3, found on page 45 of this resource book) for use in this session as well. Have available a chalkboard or chart paper.

**BACKGROUND** Creeds have been developed over the centuries as a way to teach, support, and proclaim the beliefs of faith communities. In some cases they have helped to create new denominations as people looked for other communities that shared their same beliefs. Many congregations develop a version of the creed that speaks directly to their situation. Often participants take a creed for granted as something handed down from "on high" to repeat dutifully. This activity session will help participants to become more familiar with creeds and claim their stake in them.

**WARM-UP** This group game will help participants see that, although they are unique, there are many commonalities that we have with each other. Prepare a list of 10 or 15 categories that you can use with your group. Some suggestions:

- ◆ born in November
- ◆ have families of five
- ◆ oldest child
- ◆ have brown eyes
- ◆ wearing purple socks
- ◆ had oatmeal for breakfast
- ◆ has a cat for a pet

Adjust these to fit what you know about your participants already. Ask the participants to raise their hands when one of the specific identifiers applies to them. When finished with the list, ask if anyone was surprised at the people with whom they shared things in common.

Ask the group to divide into smaller groups of three or four. (If your group is already this size, continue as one group.) Ask the group to identify something not on the previous list that they share in common. Invite each group to share the commonality that they have identified. Join together into a larger group for the next activity.

**ACTIVITY** Begin by asking participants to put themselves into a place where they are the leaders of many churches of the same denomination in a faraway area. They have come together because some of the churches have been saying things that didn't quite match with the other churches. (Or so they have heard through rumors.) Some of the people in their churches are confused about what their church really stands for. And they are afraid that some of the churches may split or go off on their own.

The job of these leaders is to come up with a group statement about what their churches really believe. The churches want to know about God, about Jesus, and about the Holy Spirit. Everyone must agree on the statements if this group of churches is going to stay together. Invite the participants to brainstorm a list of statements that they believe. These statements unite the churches. Write the statements on chart paper or a chalkboard.

When everyone is finished, thank the participants for their work. Note that when this has been done before, people took months and years to finish their creeds!

**RESPONSE** Together, read out loud the creed created. Explain that the creed statements show the shared faith that develops within worshiping communities. Invite them to think about their own beliefs and how they fit into the creeds they say in worship.

## Deeper involvement in worship rituals

# Are you listening?

### FOCUS

The kyrie is a cry to God to listen to our prayers and a way to focus our worship and praise on issues of our community.



**PREPARATION** Have copies of *LBW* and other kyrie liturgies in use by your congregation available to use in this session. The most recent edition of your local Sunday newspaper will be helpful as well. If you wish to sing during the closing, you may want to have a guitar or piano (and someone to play it) available. Have chart paper or a chalkboard for making a list.

**BACKGROUND** This ritual is in many ways an ideal one for confirmation age participants. The willingness to challenge authority and seek ideals is forming a spirit that often feels the need to cry out in anguish over the present state of affairs. Many teens are frustrated at what they see as a lack of movement by the adults in power to change the things they don't like. Many teens are frustrated with God for this same reason. The kyrie is a response that reminds us as a community of God that all is not well. The kyrie is a framework for us to use as we remember our connections to the world around us. The activities in this session are meant to help participants find their connection to the kyrie by personally naming those things that they know need God's help and intercession.

**WARM-UP** As participants gather, ask them to take a page or two of the Sunday newspaper and look for stories that they wish they could help resolve. Ask them to write down the headlines for these articles on the chalkboard or chart paper as they find them. When all have had the chance to locate one or two,


choose a couple from the list and ask the participants how they could be of help in this situation.

**ACTIVITY** Have participants pair up and tell each other everything they ate the previous day. Allow 30 to 60 seconds. Then ask participants to report as much of what they heard as they can remember to another pair. Then ask participants how carefully they thought they listened and were listened to. Most youth will not have proven to be good listeners. Explain to the participants that listening is a key skill for the kyrie. A congregation that worships using the kyrie believes that God is listening to these prayers. Ask participants how well they think they listen to the prayers and cries of people around them.

Note that listening is a skill that is learned, and ask the participants to help you list things that show that someone is a good listener (*looks at you, nods, looks interested, asks questions to help clarify, paraphrases what you say, doesn't interrupt or change the subject*). Also note that the kyrie is a way to help worshipers focus on areas of concern.

Next, ask participants to pair up again and this time tell each other about a problem in the world that concerns them that they would like to see changed, like pollution, crime, poverty, or hunger. Ask participants to try to use the items on the listening list this time. Finally, ask them for any thoughts on what happened differently this time.

**RESPONSE** Look together at a kyrie liturgy that your congregation uses. Ask the participants to help you name all of the things that are prayed for. Then invite them to name things that concern them related to each of the areas named in the kyrie. Finally, sing or say the kyrie liturgy together, inserting the list of concerns as a prayer. Conclude by saying the congregation's response.

 See corresponding activity in the *Youth Journal*, page 59.

## Deeper involvement in worship rituals

# Thanks and giving

### FOCUS

The activities in this section are meant to awaken participants to the relevance of the offertory and help them to see themselves as active participants in this part of the life of the church.



**PREPARATION** Make enough photocopies of the Giving the Hard Way handout for each participant (Reproducible Page 4, found on page 46 of this resource book). Gather thank-you cards, or blank paper folded into cards, and envelopes for all participants prior to the session. *LBW* or other worship books in use by your congregation will be useful for this session. Choose a song of thanks to close this activity if you wish.

**BACKGROUND** The offertory supports a lifestyle of giving and reminds us that we give because we have been blessed with gifts. The old phrase "better to give than receive" holds little merit in our contemporary society. Gift giving in some cultures, however, is truly a way of life, and in earlier days may have been the way of survival. Youth may find it difficult to be thankful offering givers if they absorb the societal messages of grab, hoard, and protect as much as you can. The offertory provides a message that runs counter to messages of society. This part of the worship service, by its familiarity and routine use, is easy to gloss over. Involvement for youth is often limited to rare ushering opportunities. Without incomes, most youth rely on parents for monetary contributions to church offerings.

**WARM-UP** Sing or read aloud an offertory from a worship book in use by your congregation. Ask participants to look for the messages about giving that are found in the offertory and have them paraphrase them when you are done. You may choose to list these on a chalk-

board or chart paper where they can be viewed during this session and referred to later.

**ACTIVITY** Distribute the reproducible page Giving the Hard Way. Invite the participants to follow the directions and complete the activity.

When the participants have had a chance to rank the list from easiest to hardest, ask them to share their list with a partner. Then lead the group in coming to consensus on the top two easiest and hardest. Invite the participants to share by asking them why they thought certain "gifts" were easy or hard to give. Do the same with receiving the gifts.

**RESPONSE** Provide each participant with one thank-you card. Ask them to write a thank-you note for a gift that God has given them. Have them place these thank-you cards in a box in the middle of the room. If you wish, sing a song about thanking God.

## Deeper involvement in worship rituals

# Praying together

### FOCUS

Prayers focus our thoughts and draw us together as a community as we continually seek to know God's will.



**PREPARATION** Before the session, gather together paper, writing instruments, and copies of *LBW* or other liturgies your congregation uses. Cut each piece of paper into four strips, making enough so that each participant may have four.

**BACKGROUND** Prayer comes in so many forms and has so many uses that it is impossible to cover all of the elements that may be helpful as background. For most youth, the common table graces, the standard Lord's Prayer, and the church service prayers are practiced. Most youth will also be able to tell you that they pray at times of stress or joy. Expand this idea by saying that prayer is the way we live our lives.

In this session, participants will look at how

prayer is used in the worship service to help people focus, come together, and share common concerns. It will also help them to find ways of becoming more involved in prayer by looking at three very different types of prayer. These are meant to help participants explore ways of making prayer a more personal and relevant part of their lives.

**WARM-UP** This silent prayer will actually be a time for participants to write a short note to God. Explain that you would like them to write this note as if they were planning to meet God, their friend, between classes at school and will be handing the note over in passing. Give them a few quiet minutes to complete this. Suggest to the participants that God listens in all languages and hears us even in simple, friendly notes.

**ACTIVITY** Dance and movement can be especially helpful ways for people to focus and center their thoughts. Praying with movement connects body and spirit deeply in the prayer. Ask participants to consider some camp songs or others they have learned that include motions. Invite them to go through the motions without saying the words. See if other participants recognize the song. After a few songs, point out that this same thing can be done with prayer.

As a group, pick one of the prayers in your liturgy (you may want to have a list ready for them to choose from). Then for each of the phrases, create a motion. Give each participant (or group of participants) one of the motions.

Ask the first person or group to share their motion and keep doing it over and over. Ask the next person or group to add the motion chosen for their phrase. Each person or group continues until the prayer is complete. When all have joined together in movement, say, "Freeze." All the participants should hold their position. Invite them to stand quietly and take in this prayer sculpture for a few moments. Then when participants have returned to their places, ask them how their "sculpture" could be recognized as the prayer.

**RESPONSE** For a final prayer, ask participants to use more slips of paper and write one or two concerns, joys, sorrows, or other things that they would like to pray (talk with God) about. Invite them to write just one thing per slip. Each slip should start with "Dear God," note one item, and end with "Lord, in your mercy." Use a large bowl or can to collect the prayers.

Begin the prayer yourself with a phrase like "Dear God, we gather together here for prayer as the community of God . . ." then pass the container around and ask each participant to take one slip and read the prayer that is written on it.

At the end of each prayer petition, the group will respond, "Hear our prayer." Keep going until all the slips have been read.

## Story sharing from the home

# Introduction

The telling of stories is central to our faith. The basis of our faith, the Bible, is a set of stories passed on from generation to generation. This collection of stories provides the wisdom that the ancient Hebrew society determined as necessary for moral, ethical, and even physical survival. Storytelling assured that the wisdom would be remembered.

In a time before video- and audiotape, computers and microfilm, photos and historical texts, storytelling was the way of recording. The storyteller was the most important person of the village, because he or she held the knowledge and information necessary for living. The scarcity of written materials, and of those who could understand them, meant that the storyteller became the medium people used to pass on to others the events and values important to them.

However, storytelling is an art that can not be guarded like written material. As people learned the stories themselves and passed on this information to others, they became a part of the network of knowledge. Storytelling brings everyone into the circle of knowledge and allows this knowledge to spread rapidly. It is nearly impossible to silence a storyteller. And once a story has been told, it can not be untold.

It can be forgotten, however. Remembering the stories has always been a problem for societies without accurate recording methods. Alterations, translations, omissions, and even misinterpretations occur. The Judeo-Christian faith, based upon a people who relied on storytelling for record keeping, has not been immune from this problem. However, some still argue that inspired stories could not be told inaccurately.

The stories have impact not because they can be proven to be historically accurate, literally true, or factually provable; it is instead because they can help us to be people of God who live faithful lives. The beauty of the stories lies in their ability to teach us truth. The stories are powerful because they have been remembered for so many generations.

Jesus was a storyteller. He knew the power of a well-told story. He also knew that if he told

people a story, they would tell it to others, and the message would spread. What a radical difference this was from keeping the "truths" in untouchable places like tabernacles for only the most powerful to access!

Jesus must have been aware of the need for these stories to be remembered. He often quoted scripture, and he told parables. Parables could be remembered and told again because of their simplicity. But as the early producers of the Bible realized, people would remember the stories differently. Several versions of stories sometimes appear. No one knew for sure which telling was closest to the stories told by Jesus during his ministry.

In remembering, we find a need to aim for the original story. We want to be as close to the telling as possible. We look for eyewitness sources. We dig for earliest works. We search for words that cannot be misinterpreted. And we get frustrated.

In the end, all we can rely on is faith in the power of the story to tell truth. We must be able and willing to invite the story into our life. We must be able to remember the story and indeed, tell the story. It is not enough to merely hear the story told. This will not support a faith. We must make the story our story. We must become the storyteller.

At the beginning of his ministry, Jesus proclaimed that the scriptures had been fulfilled. We must find a way for the story to be told through us, through our words, deeds, thoughts, and desires. If we are the story, the story will live on and will be remembered and will continue to be told.

This unit will provide you with many activities, ideas, and suggestions for sharing stories. These are meant to be used within a small group setting. Larger groups should divide into groups of no more than 12. The activities offer participants opportunities to share stories from their homes as a way to talk about the faith they share. Many of these activities could be used more than once during a year. The content for these sessions can be driven by the needs of your group. Use the ideas provided here to organize story sharing opportunities during confirmation sessions.

Story sharing from the home

## Guided questions

### FOCUS

A story can be remembered by using questions to trigger memories.



**PREPARATION** List these “reporter’s questions” on chart paper or a chalkboard prior to session time:

- ◆ What was the event?
- ◆ When did it take place?
- ◆ Where did it take place?
- ◆ Who was there?
- ◆ What happened?
- ◆ What happened next?
- ◆ Tell me more about . . .

**ACTIVITY** Divide the group into pairs or trios. Identify one of the participants as the storyteller. The other participant will lead the storyteller through a story about a family gathering. That person can begin by saying, “Think about a family gathering that is memorable.” Draw attention to the sample reporter’s questions. Then, using the reporter’s list of who, when, where, why, what, and how questions, draw out the story.

**RESPONSE** How did the questions help you to remember more details than you may have told about the story? Did the questions get in the way of telling the story?

Story sharing from the home

## Passing respect

### FOCUS

Story sticks and sacred pipes are used in Native American storytelling cultures as a way to hold attention and respect. Whoever holds the object is the storyteller, and everyone listens to what it is that that person has to say.



**PREPARATION** Choose an object to use to identify the storyteller in this activity. The object might be a special rock, a Christmas ornament, a piece of plastic fruit from a centerpiece, a glass or ceramic figurine, and so forth.

**ACTIVITY** Invite the group to sit together in a circle. Ask the participants to share stories of objects that have meaning in their households. Pass the object around the group to each participant. When they receive the object to hold, it is their turn to share a story. It is okay to pass until they are ready to take a turn, but encourage sharing here.

**RESPONSE** How did having the object in your hands help you to tell the story? What did it feel like to have everyone’s attention during your telling of the story? Encourage them to share examples of the ways their families listen when stories are told.



See corresponding activity in the *Youth Journal*, page 60.

Story sharing from the home

## Shared telling of a story

### FOCUS

Stories change as perspectives change.



**PREPARATION** Choose a topic that is relevant for everyone in the group. Some possibilities are a family picnic, holiday mealtime, birthday celebration, or vacation.

**ACTIVITY** Form a circle. Begin a story using the topic you chose, but tell only a brief portion of the story. Each participant may add just a sentence or two to the story. Then stop and let the next participant in the circle begin where the story left off. Continue around the circle until the end of the story.

**RESPONSE** How was the story more interesting told by more than one teller? How did the story change from what you had first imagined?

Story sharing from the home

## A picture tells a . . .

### FOCUS

A story can be remembered through the use of photos.



**PREPARATION** This activity could be a good one to use with cross-generational groupings as well as with your confirmation group. Call the participants in your confirmation group and ask them to bring in a photo from their

childhood that reminds them of a story. The photos should be snapshots of particular experiences, not school photos or portraits.

**ACTIVITY** Invite the participants to tell about the event in the picture. Then ask them to share other details of the event that are not represented in the picture.

**RESPONSE** How did the photos help in telling your story? What new insights did you gain about others in your group?

Story sharing from the home

## Third-person account

### FOCUS

Telling a story from an observer’s point of view can bring new insights into the story.



**PREPARATION** Leaders should be aware that some confirmation participants may be coming to church for the first time and do not have stories about their family experiences at church. Phrase the questions for this activity sensitively with this in mind.

**ACTIVITY** Invite each participant to share a story about an experience that they, or someone else in their family, has had at church.

**RESPONSE** What did it feel like to tell this story? Was it hard or easy to share a story on this topic? Why?

## Story sharing from the home

# Sharing journals

### FOCUS


The process of writing down stories can be helpful for remembering and sharing.



**PREPARATION** Provide writing paper and file folders or large-sized construction paper to decorate and use as covers for making story journals. Have markers available to use in decorating.

**ACTIVITY** Make and decorate the story journals. Stories can be collected in the journals and shared when there is time together during a session. These journals should be seen as public collections, not as personal diaries. The stories can be shared in session time and responded to in group conversation. This activity might be helpful if the group cannot always meet regularly.

**RESPONSE** How does writing a story change how it is told? How does it feel to share a written story with someone else? How does writing the story help you to remember it?

 See corresponding activity in the *Youth Journal*, page 61.

## Story sharing from the home

# Calendars

### FOCUS

Dates or reminders of special days can be enough to spur a memory of a story or help remember minor events.



**PREPARATION** Find an old calendar that has lots of notes on many dates. A family event calendar is a good one for this.

**ACTIVITY** Invite the participants to look at the calendar. Then ask the participants to remember and share stories about a particular "date" that is important to their families.

**RESPONSE** What "dates" hold enough significance to allow you to remember the story by just hearing the date? (*For instance, December 25.*) How does a small note on a calendar lead you to remember other events not as significant? Encourage participants to go home and look at their family calendar or other places where notes about past events might be recorded. Say that remembering events from the past can help us shape the future.

## Story sharing from the home

# Role playing

### FOCUS

Stories can be told through role playing.



**PREPARATION** Decide prior to session time the stories to be role-played. They may be family or church related, or retellings of biblical stories.

**ACTIVITY** Ask participants to share a story about a family at a church event. Invite participants to use examples from their lives as they play out the story. Or retell one of the biblical stories, giving participants the roles and the scene to act it out. This would be most effective with stories that are not as familiar to the group. Role plays can be most effective when roles are clearly defined but the scene is left open for interpretation.

**RESPONSE** How does being in a "role" help you to share a story? How does acting out a story help you to remember it?

## Story sharing from the home

# Music and songs

### FOCUS

Putting stories to music can make them easier to remember.



**PREPARATION** Find copies of camp songs or hymns that tell stories. Have writing paper and pencils available to use in this session.

**ACTIVITY** Look at the camp songs and hymns that tell stories. Share those stories together by singing one or more of them together. Invite the participants to write down a family story in the verse form of one of these songs. Then sing it using the same tune of one of these songs, or make up an original melody.

**RESPONSE** Make a list together of as many biblical stories as you can think of that are told through songs. Is it harder to remember a song if you speak it instead of sing it? Why? (*This question could be answered in different ways. Be ready to affirm all responses, including those from participants who really do not enjoy singing!*)

## Story sharing from the home

# Call and response

### FOCUS

Responding to a story can be a method for sharing other stories that are related to the main story.



**PREPARATION** Prior to the session, call one of the participants and ask if he or she could share with the confirmation group a story

about a painful experience that he or she has had.

**ACTIVITY** Ask the participant with the prepared story to share it with the group. Invite the others to listen carefully, then consider how this story connects with something in *their* lives. The members of the group should then respond to the story by sharing their own stories of painful experiences.

**RESPONSE** How does one story trigger another? How does it help you to remember the main story?

## Story sharing from the home

# Family commandments

### FOCUS

Stories are often used to point out rules and guidelines for living.



**PREPARATION** Make a list of rules and guidelines on chart paper or on the chalkboard. Use the list below to begin with if you need ideas.

- ◆ No put-downs
- ◆ Listen respectfully to the person who is talking
- ◆ Don't talk with your mouth full
- ◆ Phone calls limited to 20 minutes

**ACTIVITY** Ask each participant to share a family story that relates with how one of these rules was taught to him or her.

Read together a portion of the Exodus story from chapter 19 to learn more about the story of how the Ten Commandments were given to the Hebrew people. Start early in the chapter before Moses ascends the mountain.

**RESPONSE** Is it easier to remember rules that have stories connected to them? What other stories do you know that give you good guidelines for living?

## Story sharing from the home

# Puppets

### FOCUS

Using puppets can help participants share stories.



**PREPARATION** Gather supplies to make puppets prior to session time. Supplies might include items from the list below. (Not all of these are necessary. You might begin with just some of them.) Or you might wish to gather ready-made puppets from your home. Some libraries have them available to check out as well.

- ◆ clean, old socks
- ◆ gloves
- ◆ cardboard tubes
- ◆ wooden spoons
- ◆ markers
- ◆ glue
- ◆ cloth scraps
- ◆ yarn
- ◆ wiggly eyes
- ◆ felt
- ◆ construction paper

**ACTIVITY** Find or make puppets (simple or elaborate puppets work equally well) to “tell” a family story about separation, which may be difficult or painful. Participants could also be encouraged to use their puppets to prepare a biblical story, such as the Holy Week story, for telling to a younger audience.

**RESPONSE** How does having the puppet tell the story make it easier or harder for you? What stories work well with puppets?

## Story sharing in the home

# Expectations

### FOCUS

As each part of a story is told, one anticipates the final conclusion of the story.



**PREPARATION** Divide a large sheet of chart paper or a chalkboard into five sections to use in creating a group story. Mark the sections with these headings:

- ◆ Introduction
- ◆ Setting and time of day
- ◆ Who was there
- ◆ Story problem or action
- ◆ Solution/ending

Provide writing paper and pencils for use in this session.

**ACTIVITY** Divide the group into five smaller groups of no more than four or five participants. A group may be as small as one person for this activity.

Ask the participants to create a story about a family trip. Tell them to use the five headings on the chart paper or chalkboard as a guide. Encourage them to include details from trips they may have taken in their own families. Give each group writing paper and pencils for note taking.

Next, invite the groups to take turns telling their stories.

**RESPONSE** Anticipation of the coming of the Christ child is part of what Advent is all about. How does anticipating the ending of a story help build interest in a story?

## Story sharing from the home

# Wilderness journey

### FOCUS

Sharing stories can be enriched when people have an opportunity to think reflectively about them before sharing them.



**ACTIVITY** Read together the story of Jesus’ struggle in the wilderness (Matthew 4:1-11 or Luke 4:1-13). Ask for volunteers to read.

Next, invite the participants to reflect on a family story about a particular struggle or an issue that has already been resolved. Invite the group to meditate for several minutes about the story. Play soft, soothing music, or have a picture of Jesus’ temptation story for the participants to use to center their attention.

After five or ten minutes of quiet time, ask each participant to share what they thought about during the meditation time.

**RESPONSE** How did having the quiet meditation time help you to prepare for sharing the story? How did knowing that you would be talking about the story help you to focus during the meditation time?

## Story sharing from the home

# Retelling as our story

### FOCUS

Taking an old story and putting it into a new context can give it a new meaning.



**ACTIVITY** Read together Exodus 14. Invite the participants to retell the story as if it were happening to them, in this place, at this time. Use

the names of the participants and names of local places in the retelling. Allow all members to participate by taking turns.

**RESPONSE** What is different about the new version of the story compared to the biblical version? Ask the participants if they have family stories that sound familiar to the new version of this story.

## Story sharing from the home

# Baptized we live

### FOCUS

Baptism stories can offer a common ground for the sharing of faith stories.



**PREPARATION** Two weeks prior to using this activity, invite confirmation participants to seek out information about their baptisms. If they can find copies of their baptismal records or photographs, invite them to bring them for use in this session. For the session, have large chart paper and markers.

**ACTIVITY** Ask the participants to share information about their baptisms, using the pictures and information that they brought to help.

Ask the participants to add a picture, scripture verse, or a symbol to a group mural. Use the mural to illustrate that Holy Baptism unites us into a shared story that includes the larger family of God in which all of us participate.

**RESPONSE** Display the mural in the classroom or on a wall in a hallway. What are some common elements in the baptismal stories? How does your family help you remember this story?



Story sharing from the home

# Community wisdom

## FOCUS

Taping stories of older members of the congregation can be a powerful way of affirming their wisdom and experience while collecting stories for sharing later.



**PREPARATION** This activity is preparation for a project that will be completed outside of session time. Gather a list of names and phone numbers of older members of the congregation who would be receptive to visiting with youth. Ask a pastor to help identify these people.

Have writing paper and pencils available for making notes about the questions to ask.

Make a plan for accessing cassette tape recorders for use in this activity.

**ACTIVITY** Ask participants to contact older members of the congregation and invite them to share a story for taping. They could contact someone they already know or someone from the list of people you provide. Help participants choose themes for the interview questions, such as a story from their life in church, or one from their ministry in daily life, or their thoughts related to a biblical story that is important to them.

In preparation for this activity, encourage using open-ended questions or phrases, such as "Please share a story about . . ." Tell the participants that questions that can be answered with yes or no will not provide them with stories.

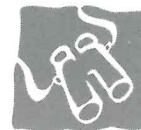
**RESPONSE** Make plans to share the taped stories in class during a future session.

Story sharing from the home

# Storyboard drawings

## FOCUS

Seeing a story presented visually can assist in sharing and clarifying a story's sequence of events.



**PREPARATION** Photocopy Storyboard Creation (Reproducible Page 5, found on page 47 of this resource book) for participants to use in this session. Have pencils available for use in this session.

**ACTIVITY** Ask the participants to draw out the sequence of events for a family story about something that their family has created together. Distribute the reproducible pages to help participants with this process.

When complete, ask the participants to exchange their storyboards and have a partner tell the story according to the storyboard sheet.

**RESPONSE** How does having the sequence of events visible help to share more details about the story? What details would you have added to the storyboard after hearing the story told?

Story sharing from the home

# Christmas decorations

## FOCUS

An object may inspire memories of stories that are worth remembering.



**PREPARATION** Gather objects connected to Christmas, such as ornaments or figurines, to use in this session.

**ACTIVITY** Talk about family times of decorating for Christmas. Show some of the ornaments and other objects, and share some simple stories from your past. Invite the participants to share family stories from their households.

**RESPONSE** What family stories or traditions are connected to the following Christmas occurrences: candle lighting? tree trimming? special meals? travel or guests? special worship events? songs? gifts?

Story sharing from the home

# Sharing stories after a death

## FOCUS

Finding items that trigger memories of a person's life is a way of celebrating that person's life with us and holding the memories close.



**PREPARATION** Gather a wide variety of objects, photos, and magazines.

**ACTIVITY** Invite the participants to choose a photo, object, or magazine picture that reminds them of a story about someone they know who has died. If there is a person who doesn't know someone who has died, invite that person to work with another group member. When the objects or pictures have been chosen, invite each participant to share a story and why the item was chosen. Allow the participants some time to share their feelings about the stories heard.

**RESPONSE** How does having something tangible help in the sharing of memories of someone who is no longer with us? How can remembering stories help people deal with their fears of losing memories of a person?

Story sharing from the home

# Forgiveness

## FOCUS

A trusting environment can offer a safe place for the sharing of stories of confession.



**PREPARATION** Read Luke 23 and become familiar with the forgiveness story presented in this passage.

**ACTIVITY** Begin by reading together the story of the crucifixion in Luke 23. Pay special attention to the forgiveness verses 39-43. Encourage the participants to remember this story as they work through the next part of this activity.

Ask the participants to choose someone they feel comfortable with and can trust to talk with in this portion of the session. Allow time for the participants to share a story about an experience for which he or she feels a need to be forgiven.

If there is time, encourage the participants to pretend that their partners are people from whom they are seeking forgiveness. Role-play a conversation that might take place.

**RESPONSE** How do trusting relationships allow people to share more openly? Will this confession be easier to make after telling it once in this setting?

Story sharing from the home

# Today's news

## FOCUS

Current events or stories can be starting places for sharing personal stories.



**PREPARATION** Collect recent newspapers and news magazines for use in this session.

**ACTIVITY** Bring recent newspapers or news magazines, and ask participants to choose a story that is of interest to them because of their own experiences.

Then encourage the group to show the news story that they chose and share stories from their own lives that have something in common with the news stories. Note that this does not mean having a story that is exactly the same, only that an element of the story can be related.

**RESPONSE** How does connecting a part of your life to another story help you to understand and relate to events in the news better? How did hearing other participants' stories help you to share more?

### Story sharing from the home

## Cooking up a memory

#### FOCUS

Special meals or foods often hold stories of events, people, or places.



**PREPARATION** Provide writing paper and/or drawing paper, pencils, and markers for use in this session.

**ACTIVITY** Ask each participant to think of a special mealtime that they remember. Invite them to write or draw a menu that describes it on a piece of writing paper. When finished, share any stories that are connected to the meals.

**RESPONSE** How does the meal and story you chose compare with how the church celebrates communion?

### Story sharing from the home

## Naming story

#### FOCUS

Our names have meaning and background and were chosen for many reasons.



**PREPARATION** Two weeks prior to this session, give a copy of Naming Story (Reproducible Page 6, found on page 48 of this resource book) to each participant and ask them to find out as much as they can about how they were named.

Gather and bring name books for use in this session.

**ACTIVITY** Ask the participants to use the Naming Story information that they gathered prior to the session to share stories about how their names were chosen. Note how naming and the meaning of names are used in biblical stories, such as the story about how Abram and Sarai's names were changed in Genesis 17.

**RESPONSE** For what reasons do people change their names? What biblical stories of name changes do you remember? If you have more time, explore the Bible for others whose names were changed (such as, Jacob—Israel and Saul—Paul).

### Story sharing from the home

## Birth story

#### FOCUS

Knowing one's birth story can be a part of building one's identity. Use this activity on dates close to participants' actual birthdays or during one session while reading the story of Jesus' birth from Luke 2.



**PREPARATION** Make a list each in the year of birthdates of confirmation participants if you would like to use this activity on those dates. Please be sensitive to participants who may have been adopted and know fewer details about their births. Affirm all of the stories.

Read the Luke 2 story of Jesus' birth. At the end of the session the week prior to the one when this activity will be used, encourage the participants to ask their parents or guardians for more information about the day they were born.

**ACTIVITY** Invite the participants to share any details, circumstances, or stories they have heard about their births.

**RESPONSE** How is Jesus' identity made more significant by the telling and retelling of his birth story at Christmas? How does what you know about your birth help you to know who you are?

### Story sharing from the home

## A story of thanks

#### FOCUS

Remembering a story of how someone has been helpful to you can be a way of saying thank-you.



**PREPARATION** Provide writing and drawing paper, pencils, and markers for use in this session.

**ACTIVITY** Ask each participant in the group to share a story of how someone in his or her family was helpful to him or her. Ask the participants to write or draw their memories of these experiences. Encourage them to take their work home and share them with the family member as a gesture of thanks.

**RESPONSE** How did it feel to tell the story to the group? How do you think it will feel to share the story with the family member?

### Story sharing from the home

## I have a friend who . . .

#### FOCUS

Sometimes it is easier to tell a story about yourself if you can have someone else take your place in the story.



**PREPARATION** Think of a personal story you can share that follows the directions from this activity to begin this session time.

**ACTIVITY** Share a personal story by changing the names of all of the people in the story. Then invite the participants to do the same.

(Note that most often we tell this kind of a story when we don't want others to know it is about us, but often they will guess that it is anyway!)

**RESPONSE** How does getting some distance from your place in the story affect how you tell a story? How did it feel knowing that the others knew the story was about you anyway?

### Story sharing from the home

## Sharing an Easter story

### FOCUS

Some stories are hard to believe. They must be taken on faith.



**ACTIVITY** Ask the participants to think of a family story that includes something about themselves that is somewhat hard to believe. Ask for volunteers to share their stories, knowing that some may not believe them. Ask everyone to refrain from questioning the story.

**RESPONSE** How does your faith help you to accept some stories that seem too hard to believe? How did the original tellers of the Easter story deal with their "hard-to-believe" story found in Matthew 28, Mark 16, Luke 24, and John 20?

### Story sharing from the home

## Promises, promises

### FOCUS

By sharing stories of a promise made, one can gather more support for living the promise.



**PREPARATION** Think of a personal story about a promise you have made to share with the participants at the beginning of this session.

**ACTIVITY** Share your personal story. Then invite the participants to share a family story about a promise they have made. Invite the other participants to consider ways of helping the storyteller keep their promises. Read together a promise story from the Bible such as the Noah story found in Genesis 8:20—9:17.

**RESPONSE** Why do you think remembering the promise stories was so important to biblical story characters? How do you feel having others know this story?

### Activities for openings and closings

## Introduction

The activities in this section are worship related and are intended for use during confirmation sessions, retreats, intergenerational events, and other times when worship is appropriate. They will each take approximately 15 minutes to do. There are places for songs of your choosing for use at the end of each activity. If your congregation is in need of songbooks to use, consider these titles, which are carried by Augsburg Fortress: *The Other Songbook*, revised edition (Phoenix: The Fellowship Publications, 1971), *Songs for a New Creation* (Minneapolis: Augsburg Publishing House, 1982), *Lift Your Voice* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1985), *The Group Songbook* (Loveland, Colorado: Group Publishing, Inc., 1991), and *All God's People Sing* (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1986). See the Augsburg Fortress catalog for ordering information. Or you may wish to choose a hymn from *Lutheran Book of Worship* for this time.

Bibles and songbooks are needed for all of the opening and closing activities.

two or three reasons for including a habit on the good or bad list.

Invite a volunteer to read Matthew 3:1-12. Discuss together how this passage might tie in to the previous discussion on habits.

**RESPONSE** Explain that repentance means to change direction. Make a circle with everyone facing out. Ask each person to pray for God's help in changing a bad habit. As they ask for God's help, they "change direction" and turn around to face the center of the circle. Close with a group AMEN!

**SONG** Sing a song about changing or forgiveness.

### Activities for openings and closings

## Dream trips

### FOCUS

Mary, Joseph, and Jesus escape to Egypt  
Matthew 2:13-23



### MATERIALS NEEDED

Balloons  
One push pin  
Sticky note paper

Pencils  
Pillow

**ACTIVITY** Give each person a balloon. Have the participants blow them up and tie them off. Hold a push pin in one fist. Approach one person and hold out both fists. Ask each person to pick which fist has the pin. If the person guesses correctly, you won't pop his or her balloon. If he or she guesses incorrectly, use the pin to pop the balloon. Pretend to change fists as you go to each person, but always keep the push pin in the same hand.

After going to everyone ask, "How did you feel as you had to pick the fist without the pin? How do you avoid danger in everyday life?" Have a volunteer read Matthew 2:13-23. Ask, "How did Jesus' family know to leave Egypt and

### Activities for openings and closings

## Daily turnaround

### FOCUS

The proclamation of John the Baptist  
Matthew 3:1-12



### MATERIALS NEEDED

Chart paper  
Markers

**ACTIVITY** Form two teams. Give each team a sheet of chart paper with the alphabet printed down the left side. Assign one team to identify a bad habit for each letter. Assign the other team to name a good habit for each letter. Give the groups two minutes to list as many habits as possible. Afterwards, review and complete the lists with the class. Ask volunteers to explain

avoid danger?" (God spoke to Joseph in a dream.)

Give the participants a sticky note and have them list dangers they may face at school or in their neighborhood. Stick the notes to a pillow. Say, "This is Joseph's pillow. (It's a little softer than a rock!)"

**RESPONSE** Have everyone close their eyes and put their heads down on desks or tables. Invite each person to pray silently for God's wisdom to avoid the dangers listed on the pillow notes.

**SONG** Sing a song asking for God's help.

### Activities for openings and closings

## Have you heard?

#### FOCUS

Jesus calls the disciples  
Matthew 4:12-22



#### MATERIALS NEEDED

Writing paper  
Pencils  
Snack-size candy bars

**ACTIVITY** Form two teams and have them sit in two circles. Have one person from each team leave the room. Explain to the remaining participants that they must try to get both people to sit next to them when they return. They cannot speak or write to influence the other person. They can only gesture, hum, or smile. Invite the two to return, but give them no instructions.

When the two who were gone finally join a team, ask them, "How did you feel when the groups were trying to get you to join them?" Have a volunteer read Matthew 4:12-23. Ask, "How do you think the disciples felt when Jesus invited them to join him?"

In the two teams, invite the participants to list ways we are called to follow Jesus every day. Share snack-size candy bars first with the team with the most ideas, then with everyone else.

**RESPONSE** Explain that prayers don't always have to be spoken. Give each person a folded piece of paper and have them write an invitation from God to them to follow Jesus.

**SONG** Sing a song about following Jesus.

### Activities for openings and closings

## Questions

#### FOCUS

Jesus and Nicodemus  
John 3:1-17



#### MATERIALS NEEDED

Small strips of paper with question marks drawn on them  
Treats (such as snack-size candy bars or gum)

**ACTIVITY** Make a number of tickets with question marks on them before the session. Tell everyone that you are going to spend a few minutes talking with them. As a person asks you a question, give them a ticket. Say, "Good question," and go on to the next person.

After talking to everyone, ask those with tickets to raise their hands. Give them a special treat.

Ask the group, "What was I trying to get you to do today?" (Ask questions.) "Why did I give some of you the treat?" (Because we asked a question.)

Have a volunteer read John 3:1-17. Ask, "What did Nicodemus do in this passage?" (Asked questions of Jesus.) "What was his 'treat'?" (He got answers from Jesus.)

Give a treat to those who did not get one. Also be sure everyone has a ticket. Have everyone write a question about Jesus or God on the ticket.

**RESPONSE** Form a circle and have each person pray their question.

**SONG** Sing a song about Jesus' love for us.

See corresponding activity in the *Youth Journal*, page 62.

### Activities for openings and closings

## Overcoming barriers

#### FOCUS

Jesus walks on water  
Matthew 14:22-33



#### MATERIALS NEEDED

Masking tape  
String  
Writing paper  
Prizes (candy bars or gum)  
Poster board

**ACTIVITY** Make a six-foot circle in the middle of the room with masking tape. Divide the group into teams of three or four. This activity could work with one small group as well. Give each team five feet of string, some masking tape, and three sheets of writing paper. Place a prize in the middle of the circle. Give teams three minutes to devise a strategy for getting the prize without stepping or leaning into the circle. Let teams try to get the prize.

Ask, "How did you feel trying to get the prize?" Ask for a volunteer to read Matthew 14:22-33. Ask, "How is this scripture like our activity?" (Jesus did what it took to get to the disciples; we did what it took to get to the prize.)

Give each person a 12" piece of masking tape. Have them write on the tape what it would take for Jesus to get them past a barrier they are experiencing. (Answers might include encouragement or forgiveness.)

**RESPONSE** Pray for the removal of the barriers noted on the masking tape. Make a cross on a poster board with the tape after prayer. Place the poster where it can be seen for the closing song.

**SONG** Sing a song about the greatness of God.

### Activities for openings and closings

## Shaped by God

#### FOCUS

God is the potter; we're the clay  
Isaiah 64:1-9



#### MATERIALS NEEDED

Self-hardening clay

**ACTIVITY** Have everyone find a partner. Assign one person to be the sculptor and the other the clay. Take the sculptors out of the room and assign a character for them to "sculpt" from their partners. (Use characters from the Bible, such as Moses, Noah, Sarah, Jonah's whale, and so forth.) Give sculptors two minutes to pose their clay and then have the clay guess who they are.

Ask the clay, "How did you feel as you tried to guess who you were supposed to be?" Have a volunteer read Isaiah 64:1-9.

Give the participants a piece of self-hardening clay and have them form something that represents God's shaping of their lives. Ideas could include a free-form shape, a butterfly, a tree, or a shape of their choosing. When the creations are complete, invite each person to share his or her creation and explain its significance.

**RESPONSE** Explore various poses for prayer. Offer situations (like mealtime, bedtime, worship, times of joy, sadness, illness, uncertainty, thanksgiving, and so forth), and have people pose to show God how they feel when praying in those situations. If there is time, invite the participants to suggest some situations.

**SONG** Sing a song about God's care in our lives.

See corresponding activity in the *Youth Journal*, page 63.

Activities for openings  
and closings

## Designer clothes

### FOCUS

We're clothed in salvation  
Isaiah 61:10—62:3



#### MATERIALS NEEDED

Chart paper  
Markers  
Tape

Scissors

**ACTIVITY** Form teams of three or four. Give each team several sheets of chart paper and some markers. Have them draw a garment for a specific purpose, for example: to keep sun off sunburned areas, or keep hair dry without messing it up, or provide storage room for extra food at a sports event.

After a couple minutes, invite the participants to share the garments and their purposes. Ask, "Why do you wear hats? Why do you wear a coat or jacket? How about jewelry?" Have a volunteer read Isaiah 61:10—62:3. Ask, "What are the garments Isaiah described like?"

Give each team several more sheets of chart paper, tape, and scissors. Have each group construct a "garment of salvation" and decide why particular details chosen for the garment would be included. After a few minutes, share the creations and have the participants explain the features. As a large group, talk about what "garments of salvation" might mean in the Isaiah text.

**RESPONSE** Have participants write on their creations a prayer of thanksgiving for God's gift of salvation. Have two teams join together and pray the prayers.

**SONG** Sing a praise song.

Activities for openings  
and closings

## Let there be light

### FOCUS

God made light  
Genesis 1:1-5



#### MATERIALS NEEDED

Chart paper  
Markers  
Tape player and song about God's light (such as Amy Grant's "Thy Word")

**ACTIVITY** Take the group to the worship area of the church. Give the participants writing paper and pencils. Invite them on a "scavenger hunt" where they will list as many sources of light as possible in that area. After two minutes of individual work, make a group list by combining ideas from the lists of participants.

Invite a volunteer to read Genesis 1:1-5. Ask, "Before there was light, what was the world like? (*Formless and void.*) What did God see after creating light? (*That the light was good.*)" Say, "When our lives seem confusing and empty, God brings light into our lives. And with that light, we can see good."

Give each person a sheet of paper and have them draw a source of light on it. Invite all to spend a moment thinking about a time when God's light helped them see good in a confusing situation. Make a symbol for that time on the paper.

**RESPONSE** Have the group stand near the altar in the worship area. If you have prepared this, listen to Amy Grant's "Thy Word" while each person silently offers the situation and the light sheet by placing it on the altar.

**SONG** Sing a song about God's light.

Activities for openings  
and closings

## Promises defined

### FOCUS

God's covenant with Noah  
Genesis 9:8-17



#### MATERIALS NEEDED

Writing paper marked as noted below  
Crayons or markers

**ACTIVITY** Before the session, write the following words at the top of individual sheets of paper (one word per sheet): agreement, promise, deal, pact, bargain, compact, covenant, pledge, treaty, and understanding. Give one sheet to each person or pair in the group. Allow 90 seconds for participants to write definitions for their words.

When everyone is finished, invite volunteers to share their definitions with the rest of the group. Post the definitions in the shape of a large square.

Invite a volunteer to read Genesis 9:8-17. Ask, "Are there any definitions you would like to revise based on this scripture?" Make any revisions requested. Give participants crayons or markers and have them make a rainbow over the group of definitions. Say, "The rainbow is a reminder of God's promise to care for all of creation."

**RESPONSE** The first letter of the colors of the rainbow are R-O-Y-G-B-I-V. Assign a letter to each person and have them write a prayer starting with that letter.

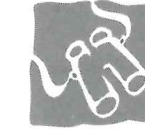
**SONG** Sing a song about God's promises.

Activities for openings  
and closings

## Terrific tutors

### FOCUS

Philip and the Ethiopian eunuch  
Acts 8:26-40



#### MATERIALS NEEDED

Writing paper  
Pencils

**ACTIVITY** Form teams of four or five. Ask each person to name one unusual thing he or she can do. After all have identified a special talent, invite each group to pick one they want to learn. The "talented" person has three minutes to teach the others.

After teaching, ask, "How did you feel trying to help the others learn? How did you feel as you started learning?" Ask a volunteer to read Acts 8:26-40.

Have the teams develop an activity to teach young children John 3:16. If time permits, invite a preschool class to experience the lessons. After teaching, have the participants discuss their experience. Remind them that we can help others understand God's love. If preschool children are unable to come to your group, share the lessons with each other.

**RESPONSE** Invite the participants to pray for someone in their church. Petitions might include "Help me encourage my friend to understand your love," or "Send me to someone who has questions about you."

**SONG** Sing a song about sharing God's love.

Activities for openings  
and closings

# Movement motivations

**FOCUS**

Bread from heaven  
John 6:25-27



## MATERIALS NEEDED

Index cards marked as indicated  
below  
Pencils

**ACTIVITY** Before the session, write the following destinations on separate index cards: gas station, fast-food restaurant, neighborhood park, the mall, and pet store. Form five teams. Give each team a card and tell them they are to help the whole group guess where their destination is by telling why someone goes there. Allow three minutes to share clues.

Invite a volunteer to read John 6:25-27. Ask, "Why did Jesus say people came to him?"

Invite each team to spend two minutes listing reasons why people need Jesus. Use the back of the index cards to list the ideas. Share responses in the large group.

Give each person another index card and have them write three or four reasons they come to Jesus.

**RESPONSE** Invite the participants to offer prayers about coming closer to Jesus. Some participants may wish to voice the prayers out loud. Invite those volunteers to do so, and then end in a few moments of silent meditation.

**SONG** Sing a song about needing Jesus' love.

Activities for openings  
and closings

# Giving thanks

**FOCUS**

Giving thanks  
Philippians 1:3-11



## MATERIALS NEEDED

Writing paper  
Pencils  
Letter paper

Envelopes

**ACTIVITY** Invite the participants to identify someone for whom they are thankful. Then ask the participants to write the name of that person vertically on a sheet of paper. Next to each letter of the name, list reasons for being thankful that begin with that letter. Choose one or two reasons to share with the whole group.

Have a volunteer read Philippians 1:3-11. Ask, "How would you feel if someone had written this in a letter to you?"

Give each participant a piece of letter paper and an envelope. Invite them to write a letter to their special people expressing thanksgiving for that person and mentioning some of the reasons listed earlier. If possible, offer a stamp for mailing. Encourage the participants to take the letter home, address it, and mail it.

**RESPONSE** Form a circle and join hands. Encourage each person to pray for his or her friend. Petitions can be as simple as "Thank you, God, for my friend." They might also be silent prayers or voiced out loud.

**SONG** Sing a song about friends.

Activities for openings  
and closings

# Growing in faith

**FOCUS**

The boy Jesus in the temple  
Luke 2:41-52



## MATERIALS NEEDED

Writing paper  
Pencils

**ACTIVITY** Form teams of three or four. Assign an age group to each team. Have the teams pantomime three things people in their age group can begin doing. Use age groups like 2-year-olds, 6-year-olds, 13-year-olds, 18-year-olds, and 35-year-olds. Have the rest of the group guess what they are pantomiming.

Ask for a volunteer to read Luke 2:41-52. Ask, "How do you feel when you want to do something, but a person in authority wants you to do something else? How do you suppose Jesus felt in this story?" Say, "Verse 51 says Jesus was obedient to his parents."

Have participants list situations when people in authority might expect us to do something that conflicts with what we believe. Say, "Sometimes, obedience is not easy. Sometimes, following our faith can mean we have to question other expectations. In all things, we can count on God for wisdom and strength to do what our faith requires."

**RESPONSE** Ask the participants to read Psalm 119:133-135 in unison.

**SONG** Sing a song of praise.

Activities for openings  
and closings

# Psalm shout

**FOCUS**

God cares for us always  
Psalm 91



**ACTIVITY** Teach the following actions to the group. When the key words are read, the group performs the actions associated with them.

**SAFETY**—Bend knees and move hands palms down and say, "S-A-A-F-E!" like a baseball umpire.

**PROTECTION**—Swing hips and arms and say, "Oo-oo-oo, God watches over you!" Give someone a high five.

**TRUST**—Stand at attention and hum a dignified song like "Pomp and Circumstance" (graduation song). Read this adaptation of Psalm 91 while the class does the actions:

They who go to God Most High for *safety* will be *protected* by the Almighty. I will say to the Lord, "You are my place of *safety* and *protection*. You are my God and I *trust* in you. The Lord is your *protection*, in *trust* you have made God Most High your place of *safety*. The Lord says, "Whoever *trusts* me, I will keep *safe*. I will *protect* those who know me. Look to the Lord; God will answer. God will be with you in trouble. God will be your *safety* and *protection*. You can *trust* in God Most High!

**RESPONSE** Participants pray to trust God in specific situations that need God's protection and safety.

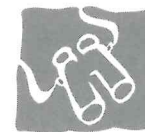
**SONG** Sing a song about trusting God.

Activities for openings  
and closings

# Special attention

**FOCUS**

The Lord is my shepherd  
Psalm 23



**ACTIVITY** Form teams of five or six people. Have each team send one volunteer out of the room. While the volunteers are out, instruct the rest of the teams to make the volunteers feel very special when they return in any ways they can think of together.

Invite the volunteers back. The groups welcome them back in very special ways of their choosing. After two minutes, ask the volunteers, "How does it feel to get so much attention?" Ask the rest of the groups, "How did you feel coming up with ways to make the volunteers feel special?"

Have one person read Psalm 23. Ask, "How would you feel if you were showered with this kind of attention from God?"

Invite the teams to reword the psalm to reflect some of the situations they face today. Share these psalm rewrites with the whole group. Then read together Psalm 23.

**SONG** Sing a prayerful song.

Activities for openings  
and closings

# Who's who

**FOCUS**

Who is Jesus?  
Colossians 1:11-20



**MATERIALS NEEDED**

Small sheets of writing paper  
marked as indicated below  
Pencils

**ACTIVITY** Before the session, write the names of everyone in the group on separate slips of paper. Distribute the slips randomly to the group. Have each participant write a description of his or her person using seven positive words.

When everyone is finished writing, have the participants place the slips of paper in a basket. Draw out one paper at a time and read it, but do not mention the name of the person the qualities describe. The rest of the group tries to guess who is being described. When everyone has had a turn, ask, "How did you feel when you suspected the description was you?"

Ask for a volunteer to read Colossians 1:11-20. Ask, "What were some of the descriptions Paul used for Jesus?"

**RESPONSE** Ask the participants to pair up. Distribute copies of *Lutheran Book of Worship*. Invite each pair to pick one hymn and talk with their partner about how that hymn describes Jesus or God. When all pairs have chosen a hymn, invite sharing in the larger group.



# Lutheran Worship Blueprint

Page numbers are for the Setting One of the liturgy.

If you have time, mark on the circle those places where hymns are sung in your worship.



**IDEAS FOR WORSHIP**

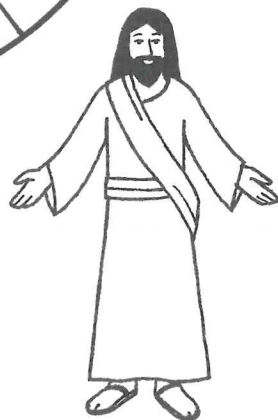
Gathering in God's name	◆◆◆◆◆◆◆◆◆◆	God's word in community	◆◆◆◆◆◆◆◆◆◆	Sharing God's meal	◆◆◆◆◆◆◆◆◆◆	Sent forth by God	◆◆◆◆◆◆◆◆◆◆	Seasons of the church year	◆◆◆◆◆◆◆◆◆◆
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# The Church Year

Label the different seasons, and color the circle using appropriate liturgical colors. The seasons and colors are:

- Advent—blue or purple
- Christmas—white
- Epiphany—green
- Lent—purple
- Easter—white
- Pentecost—green



The church year is a cycle of six seasons. Each year it retells the story of God's activity in the lives of God's people. The Church seasons help us to recognize our own stories in the story of God's people.



# Creed Creators

You are one of the leaders of many congregations of the same denomination. You have heard rumors that some congregations have been making statements that conflict with the beliefs of the greater church. Some of the people in the churches are confused about what their church really stands for. Your job is to come up with a group statement about what these churches really believe. Everyone must agree on the statements if this group of churches is going to stay together.

- ♦ As individuals, complete the "I believe" section.
- ♦ Next develop the "We believe" section with other participants.

The Nature of God  
I believe

We believe

-----  
Jesus the Christ  
I believe

We believe

-----  
The Spirit at Work  
I believe

We believe







## Giving the Hard Way



- ◆ Rank the following "gifts" by how easy it would be for you to give them.
- ◆ Next rank them by how easy it would be for the one who received the "gift."
- (1 is easiest, 10 hardest)

- |       |       |   |
|-------|-------|---|
| _____ | _____ | 1. Taxes from your paycheck given to the government                               |
| _____ | _____ | 2. An old sweatshirt that no longer fits you given to a younger brother or sister |
| _____ | _____ | 3. Volunteer time on a Saturday helping an elderly neighbor                       |
| _____ | _____ | 4. A tithe (10% of what you have) to your congregation                            |
| _____ | _____ | 5. A donation of \$1000.00 to a charity you believe in                            |
| _____ | _____ | 6. Dues for a club or sporting team you belong to                                 |
| _____ | _____ | 7. All the money in your pocket to a person looking for lunch                     |
| _____ | _____ | 8. Your hat and gloves on a very cold day to someone waiting for a bus            |
| _____ | _____ | 9. A birthday present for your mom or dad   |
| _____ | _____ | 10. A kidney to a relative needing a transplant                                   |



## Storyboard Creation



Use the boxes below to draw the scenes or the steps that describe a time when your family created something or worked on a project together. (Examples: *decorating for Christmas, cleaning the house, and so forth.*) Draw characters, add narrative balloons (comic strip style), and add scenery details to complete the story. Simple drawings are fine for this activity—work to convey information.


- ◆ When you are through, exchange your storyboard with a partner and read each other's stories.
- ◆ Ask questions to find out any details that are unclear.





# Naming Story

Collect the following information as you prepare to share the story of how you were named.

My full name:

Why was this name chosen?

What does my name say about me?

How do I feel about my name?

What does my name mean?

Who named me?

What, if any, other names were considered for me?

